

Why Develop Performance Assessments?

Assessment is a tool. To develop effective assessments, teachers need to ask:

- Why am I assessing my students?
- What information do I hope to learn through this assessment?
- What do I plan to do with the information gained through this assessment?

Link Standards and Thorough Assessment to Curriculum and Instruction

Measuring student performance must start with identifying the target. To ensure that the assessment is not focused only on vocabulary elements or grammatical structures, planning must begin with the standards for learning languages. Immediately then, the focus is on communication and a meaningful context. In national and state standards, language is described by the goal behind the communication: Is it interpretive, interpersonal or presentational? Viewed from the angle of the communicative purpose the design of the assessment and instrument used for evaluation become clearer. Both the task and the instrument used for evaluation must fit the communicative purpose. This backwards design, beginning with the end in mind, is critical for creating performance assessment tasks.

Once identified, the performance assessments become the filter for selecting the content for teaching. Now teachers have a way to make critical instructional decisions such as how much of a grammatical structure is needed in order to be successful in the assessment task; what vocabulary is essential to learn, which words might be important for passive recognition, and which do not need attention because students will have context and visual clues to figure out their meaning; and the level of accuracy needed for success.

By designing backwards- from standards to specific assessment tasks to the evaluation criteria- the teacher is developing a road map for both teaching and learning. By capturing the true goals of instruction (i.e., a detailed description of what students are actually expected to

do as a result of the instruction), the teacher is ready to target the unit and daily lesson plans and to help students know what they are supposed to learn and why.

Identifying and sharing the performance assessment tasks at the beginning of a unit, rather than keeping the assessment a mystery (as in traditional end-of-chapter tests), provides focus and motivation. If the teacher keeps the target clearly in mind throughout the preparation of a unit and the daily teaching plans, logically the students will benefit because each activity, each interaction, each question, and each learning check will be focused on what the students need in order to be successful in that assessment task. Knowing the target, students and teachers will collaboratively and jointly focus on meeting it, this increasing their chances of hitting that target.

Seven Steps for Designing Performance Assessment Tasks

1. Create a rich and engaging thematic focus
2. Identify what students need to do to demonstrate their learning
3. Evaluate tasks against the targeted level of proficiency
4. Sort performance tasks as formative or summative
5. Fine-tune and integrate the summative performance tasks
6. Incorporate other standards to enrich the unit of instruction and performance tasks
7. Pilot with students and use the results to adjust the assessment tasks

Sandrock, P. (2010). *The keys to assessing language performance: A teacher's manual for measuring student progress*. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).